

colleagues will join me in recognizing Dr. Tantaquidgeon and Ms. Langevin as we celebrate National Women's History Month.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I know of no further debate on the resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, the question is on agreeing to the resolution.

The resolution (S. Res. 100) was agreed to.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the preamble be agreed to and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of March 7, 2019, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

#### MILITARY RETIREE APPRECIATION DAY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. Res. 118 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 118) recognizing the importance of paying tribute to those individuals who have faithfully served and retired from the Armed Forces of the United States, designating April 18, 2019, as "Military Retiree Appreciation Day", and encouraging the people of the United States to honor the past and continued service of military retirees to their local communities and the United States.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 118) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of March 14, 2019, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

#### CONDEMNING THE MARCH 15, 2019, TERRORIST ATTACKS IN CHRIST- CHURCH, NEW ZEALAND

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. Res. 124 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 124) condemning the March 15, 2019, terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand, offering sincere condolences to all of the victims and their families, and expressing and standing in solidarity with the people and Government of New Zealand.

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 124) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of March 27, 2019, under "Submitted Resolutions.")

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the filing deadline for first-degree amendments with respect to the cloture motions filed during today's session relating to H.R. 268 be at 4 p.m., Monday, April 1, 2019.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### VOTER SUPPRESSION

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, the most important words in our Constitution are the first three. We all know them: "We the people," written in supersize font so we don't forget what our Constitution is all about—government, as Lincoln put it, of, by, and for the people, or, as Jefferson put it, government designed to produce laws that reflect the will of the people.

We don't see that now. We don't have a government of, by, and for the people. Instead, we have a system that has been profoundly corrupted. It has been corrupted by gerrymandering. It has been corrupted by voter suppression and intimidation. It has been corrupted by dark and dirty money that has flooded our campaigns and wiped out the voice of millions of Americans. That is where we are now in this corrupted state.

We have debates on the floor that are all about helping a small group of people within a circle of power and privilege rather than having bills that help the citizens of the United States of America. In fact, we have a President who just this week said his goal was to

tear down healthcare for 30 million Americans, to wipe out the expansion of Medicaid, to wipe out the tax credits that assist so many Americans with being able to afford insurance, to wipe out the protection to be able to get healthcare if you have a preexisting condition, and to wipe out the ability of your children to be on your policy until the age of 26. That is government by and for this very little circle of privilege and power instead of the people of the United States of America. We saw it in other ways too.

In 2017, we saw a bill that reached into the Federal Treasury, took \$1.5 trillion, and gave almost all of it to that small group of people inside that circle of privilege and power while it ignored the rest of the country. That is what happens in corrupt countries. The power elite reach in, take the Treasury for themselves, and ignore the will of the people.

Every Member of this body took a pledge to the Constitution of the United States—a Constitution not founded on we the powerful but on we the people. So I ask: Are we going to honor that oath? If we are going to honor it, it means we have to stand up and end this deep and vast corruption.

Yesterday, Senator UDALL and I and all of my colleagues on this side of the aisle introduced a bill that is designed to take on gerrymandering, to take on voter suppression, and to take on dark money. Let's talk about gerrymandering.

The Supreme Court has never done a thing about it even though it is clearly all about having the powerful choose its voters rather than having the voters choose their Representatives. It is a complete shredding of the vision of the Constitution. The Supreme Court utterly failed to act. It has a case before it now, and it will have another opportunity, but don't hold your breath.

The time to address gerrymandering is before it is done. How do you do that? You do that with independent commissions. Independent commissions have been adopted in States like Iowa, and they have been widely received by the citizens as an issue of fairness. Yet, across so many States, we have congressional districts that are deliberately gerrymandered to favor the parties in power. It has happened in Democratic States, and it has happened in Republican States. You see it sometimes by the crazy configurations of the map. Sometimes you see it when a State that is essentially equally divided between the parties produces congressional Representatives heavily leaning to one side.

It is hard to remedy after the fact, but you can remedy before the fact by having independent commissions across this country. The way you take that on is you have a group of six individuals. They take two from the Democrats and two from the Republicans and two of whom are Independents, and they may select a broader set of participants—maybe an additional three

for the Ds and three from the Rs and three from the Independents. Then, when they take votes, there has to be a vote from each of those three sectors. That is sort of the design that forces cooperation and sets up a condition of fairness, and that is what the For the People Act does that we introduced yesterday.

Now, I will tell you that State by State, and in my State, people ask: Why should I fix gerrymandering when that State over there still favors the other party? It is like waving the white flag on my turf while they are ripping us off over there. That is why it should be done at the Federal level. That is why we should pass the For the People Act.

This act takes on the issue of voting fairness. If you really believe in the vision of a democratic republic, you believe in voter empowerment, not voter suppression. Yet what have we seen this last November 6? We have seen strategies to keep college students from voting, strategies to keep communities of color from voting, strategies to keep the poor from voting, strategies to prevent Native Americans from voting. Those strategies are born from people who don't believe in the vision of our Constitution. They don't believe it is the foundation for what we have. They see this as just a game to produce a result, which is a government for that small group of people inside that circle of power and privilege. I am a little more patriotic than that. I believe in the vision of our Constitution, so let's take on these efforts to obstruct voting.

We did have a bill that had vast bipartisan support. It was called the Voting Rights Act, and we reauthorized it with vast bipartisan support because not so long ago, both sides of the aisle believed in the vision of our Constitution but not now. Unfortunately, now we are hearing that our colleagues across the aisle like voter intimidation. We see the Republican States engaging in it on a massive scale. It is increasing their power. They want to hold onto it—to clutch it to their chests and not let go. Yet, if you believe in the Constitution, if you believe in our country, you would let go. You would say: Let's appeal to all of the voters with our vision and not try to stop them from voting.

That is why we need to take down the barriers for voting. That is why we need automatic voter registration and internet registration and same-day registration—so people can sign up to vote. It means we need better access to voting so there isn't manipulation at the precinct places and so there is early voting nationwide and the right to choose to vote by mail.

Now, of course, I am a little biased on this because my home State of Oregon led the Nation in automatic voter registration, and we led the Nation in voting by mail. For those who are worrying about people voting who shouldn't be voting, nothing is more

secure than to vote by mail, and those who are worried about electronic machines being hacked and not having a paper ballot, there is nothing more secure than voting by mail.

When polls do occur and people go to those polls, shouldn't we make sure they are adequately staffed? The whole strategy of moving polling places at the last minute in order to confuse people and the whole strategy of understaffing polling places in the neighborhoods that you don't want to have vote is really evil—evil in that it takes away the vision of our Constitution. Voter empowerment is the vision; voter suppression is not. So that takes us to those polls and to our making sure we have a polling protection act. That is why we need the For the People Act—to take that on.

Then we come to dark and dirty money—money flowing in from corporations and all kinds of overseas, foreign participants. Nothing is being done here about that. Of course, the vision laid out by Thomas Jefferson called it equal voice. It meant distributed power among the electorate, not concentrated power, only with equal voice. He said it was the mother principle. Only with that do you get bills that reflect the will of the people. We are getting bills that reflect a small circle of power and privilege, not the people, because of this dark money concentrating power.

When the Koch brothers' cartel puts hundreds of millions of dollars into our campaign, the ordinary voter asks: Where is my equal voice? I don't have hundreds of millions of dollars. I will be lucky if I can give \$10 to this candidate and \$15 to that candidate. So the American people know the system is rigged—rigged in a profound way by this dark money.

Where does this come from?

It comes from that same Supreme Court that gutted the Voting Rights Act, from that same Supreme Court that failed to take on gerrymandering. It is the Court that has flipped our Constitution on its head and has replaced we the people with the vision of government by and for that small group of people in a circle of power—people like the Koch brothers, who, in 2014, spent hundreds of millions of dollars to change the makeup of this Chamber. Nobody in my blue-collar neighborhood has hundreds of millions of dollars. They know the system has been rigged. That is why we need the For the People Act—to restore the vision of our Constitution.

I encourage all red-blooded, patriotic Americans to stand up for their Constitution, to fight for the vision embodied in Jefferson's mother principle of equal voice, distributed power, and to remedy the dark money flowing through our campaigns. Not only is it vastly corrupting, but it drives vast cynicism because the people see what is going on.

Let's fix the gerrymandering on the front end. It is hard for the courts to do

it on the back end even if they had the will to do so. Let's fix fair voting on the front end and not argue about it afterward when we can't even count the ballots because there are electronic machines and people didn't have a fair chance to get to the polls. Let's fix the dark money and embrace equal voice.

I am concerned that time is short to save our Republic because the money has so piled up under this strategy of government by and for the powerful that over the last decades, while the wages and benefits of ordinary people have been flat or declining, the wealth of that small circle of power has gone through the roof.

In the first three decades after World War II, everyone participated. It was the spirit of the war. We were all in it together. Let's make our government work for all. In the midseventies, it ended—vast wealth for the wealthy and only struggling opportunities or struggling conditions for those ordinary Americans.

We have to save our Constitution. Let's do it. Let's pass the For the People Act. Let's have a full and robust debate on this floor so we will all be accountable to our citizens and to our pledge and our oath to the Constitution of the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

#### TRIBUTE TO LEIF FONNESBECK

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today to recognize a truly exceptional member of the U.S. Senate—not one who has a vote on this floor but certainly one who has wielded great influence and who has generated great appreciation from many of us who have had the privilege and the honor to serve on the Appropriations Committee, as you have.

Today I am here to speak about an individual who has been serving the U.S. Senate on the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee now for two decades, and this gentleman is a friend by the name of Leif Fonnesebeck.

Leif started with the Interior Appropriations Committee under the helm of Chairman Slade Gorton from the State of Washington and then also, of course, the chairman of the full Appropriations Committee at that time, my friend and mentor Ted Stevens.

So it is actually a little bit bitter-sweet for me to be speaking about Leif and recognizing his contributions because after two decades—21 years—Leif is retiring from public service, and I understand, certainly, his desire. Twenty years is a good run. It is a significant amount of effort and truly an admirable career.

Both Leif and I are born and raised Alaskans, and you can never take the home out of your heart. It is something that is a continual tug, and so I can certainly understand his desire to spend more time at home with the incredible Alaskans whom we call friends